# How Lucky He Is

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# How Lucky He Is

by paperowl

Summary

In the car on the way to a party Svetlana asks if he's seeing anyone, casually, almost uninterested. He claims he's not, that there's nothing serious. Then she asks "Not even Jane?" He whips his head up to look at her, and his face says, incredulously, *"Dumb question. Why would you ask me that?"*, but it also says, panicked, *"How do you know? What do you know? Why do you want to know?"*

*Oh.*

Oh *Ilya*.

Or, Svetlana figures it out, because of course she does.

Notes

4.5 years without uploading she comes back with a... somewhat upsetting oneshot actually. Heated Rivalry is tinged with tragedy. This fic is HEA because canon, but the Svetlana finds out fic was never going to be a happy one overall.

If you were wondering where I went, the answer is grad school. I had two final papers clock in at 20+ pages this semester so I have zero bandwidth for extracurricular writing. I can't promise the writing here is my best, I'm pretty rusty on all non-academic writing, but I'm glad to be diving back in.

Heated Rivalry has fandom joy I haven't experiences in ages; the characters are happy, I'm happy, everybody's happy. It's a great time. I ended up writing fic because the specific story I wanted hadn't been written yet, I got fed up with waiting, and then I remembered I could just write it myself, so here we are. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

The first time Svetlana hears the name Shane Hollander she is rescuing Ilya from a conversation between her father and his about the “fucking Canadian who thinks he’s better than a Russian”. The name doesn’t register as important, why should it, Ilya is fifteen and years away from playing against any Canadians. What is important is that Ilya looks lost standing between the two of them, not allowed to say a word despite the conversation, as always, revolving around him. And Svetlana worries.

Svetlana worries because Ilya’s father is cruel and his mother was kind. She worries because Ilya’s father is cruel and Ilya is kind. She worries because Ilya’s father is cruel, Ilya’s mother is dead, and his father seems not to care. But she can’t say that, so instead she grabs Ilya’s wrist and leads him away from a conversation about a hypothetical future that assumes far too many things about Ilya and far too many things about his rivals.

Two years later, when Svetlana hears Ilya say the name Shane Hollander for the first time it seems a whole lot more important. For one, she keeps hearing that name — Hollander is even more of a phenom at seventeen than he was at fifteen. For another, Ilya is saying Hollander is good. Really, truly good. And he means it.

In the grand scheme of things it still doesn’t matter all that much because Russia won against Canada anyway and Ilya is almost surely the first MLH draft pick. But Ilya seems excited for the challenge, happy to have real competition for the first time in a long time. So Svetlana slots Hollander’s name into her ever-growing mental hockey encyclopedia, making sure to note that he’s important, because he’s important to Ilya.

But a lot of things are important these days. Ilya is already draining his bank account for his asshole brother, and he doesn’t seem any less lost and sad around his father and, when she deigns to visit, his step-mother. Svetlana is glad he’ll be drafted, and, as a consequence, move away from Russia and his family. Svetlana’s been friends with him since essentially birth, she knows if he stayed it would end in disaster; for more reasons than one.

Svetlana doesn’t remember the first time she noticed Ilya noticing boys, but she remembers the first time the puzzle pieces clicked together. Fragments of memories falling into order; a glance here, a brush of bodies there, flickers of anger and fear ghosting across Ilya’s face when his teammates throw slurs around the bar, panicked eyes hiding behind false confidence when Svetlana asks him if he thinks her latest hookup is hot and he responds, “Not as hot as me”. She doesn’t say anything, not yet, but she knows.

Svetlana tries to love Ilya hard enough to make up for the love he doesn’t get from his family, but her love can’t erase his father’s criticisms and his brother’s hatred. Her love can’t change Russia’s laws either, even if she wishes it could. So she’s happy he’s leaving Russia, at least for a while.

Ilya is drafted first, to the Boston Raiders. Shane Hollander is drafted second, to the Montreal Metros, cementing their rivalry. As much as she hates to admit, Shane Hollander is a pretty formidable rival. Ilya agrees, though without the anger Svetlana is used to seeing directed at his opponents in Russia. She sees a flash of her Ilya there, kind, gentle, happy, and thinks the distance will do him well.

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When Svetlana surprises Ilya in Boston after a canceled game, wearing his jersey (and only his jersey) no less, she pretends to be offended when he pauses to text a 'Jane'. They're not exclusive with each other, but they're also not exclusive with others, Ilya prefers sex with no strings attached and so does she. So while she doesn't care that Ilya is texting another woman, she files away the part where he paused an active hook-up to text this 'Jane' back.

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Years pass and Svetlana moves to Boston too, first for school and then to sell sports cars to rich men with money to burn. While she never said anything in Russia, Boston is different, friendlier, so whenever the opportunity presents itself, she makes sure Ilya understands that she knows he's into men.

Svetlana learns from Sasha, high and unaware she understood enough to connect the dots, that he and Ilya had been… something, once upon a time. She knows them both well enough to guess it was just sex and Sasha wanted to pretend it was more, but she can't be sure. When she asks, Ilya doesn't deny anything, but that's all she can get out of him.

Her Ilya, ten years old and carefree, wears his heart on his sleeve, unafraid of what the world might think of him, cocooned by his mother's love. This Ilya, nineteen years old and guarded, has learned that he must hide the parts of himself his father, his brother, hockey, Russia deems unimportant, embarrassing, or offensive. This Ilya has learned that his wants, desires, and fears can be used against him, so this Ilya doesn't openly want. This Ilya doesn't openly desire. This Ilya doesn't openly fear. He can't.

Svetlana understands this Ilya, so she settles for support couched behind idle remarks about how this man or that man is attractive, doesn't Ilya notice? Maybe Ilya would be interested in a threesome with another man? Doesn't Ilya know that some of her Boston friends are gay? Doesn't he know that she likes them anyways? Sasha says hi.

They dance around the subject never saying anything outright, partially because they don't need to, and partially because saying it aloud makes it real, and Ilya goes back to Russia every summer so it really shouldn't be real. It's real nonetheless, but Svetlana sometimes forgets it is. Ilya is very good at hiding. She wishes he didn't have to be.

On her summers off she joins Ilya in Russia, pretending it's because the parties in Russia are just so much better, but really it's because Ilya needs someone on his side. His father is sick now, dementia, and though he sometimes forgets Ilya's name he never forgets his cruelty. Alexei refuses to help unless Ilya pays him, so Ilya splits his time in the summer between training, care taking, and partying.

Svetlana knows he hates it here, hates the hiding, but she does her best to make it better. She drags Ilya to parties where he drinks the night away and sleeps with just about any woman who looks at him the right way. He needs to blow off steam somehow, and it may not be healthy, but none of this is. He's like this at every party she takes him to, and probably the ones she doesn't too.

Well, he's like that at first.

With each passing year she catches him partying less in lieu of staring at his phone. She sees him in corners staring into that phone like it's his lifeline and worries he's found a new way to hide. So subtly, she tries to pull him back to the present and the party, a hand on his arm, a kiss on the cheek, occasionally literally pulling him to the dance floor. It works less and less effectively each time. When she can she sneaks a glance at the phone screen. She rationalizes these glances as necessary, to make sure Ilya is okay. But each time, all she sees the same name at the top of a text conversation; Jane.

Interesting.

Ilya hasn't stopped sleeping with a nearly endless stream of women, including Svetlana, when the mood strikes. He never mentions a relationship or a regular hook-up other than her. And yet here he is, texting some American woman in the middle of his summers in Russia and refusing to say a word about it.

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Somewhere in the blur of passing years she meets some of Ilya's Boston teammates. This is where she learns of Ilya's Montreal Girl. The night begins innocently, his teammates ribbing him for bringing a girl out to a club as his date instead of picking one up as the night goes on, "You're robbing yourself of options, man!". Ilya laughs and says something about her being his best option and the conversation moves on.

Several drinks in Ilya gets a text that, for the first time that night, he actually reads and responds to. Whatever the contents of the message, they make Ilya smile fondly at his phone.

"Ten dollars that's his Montreal Girl!" Marleau says with a smirk. Marleau is the teammate Svetlana has heard the most about. Apparently he and Ilya are close friends. Svetlana has never heard of a Montreal Girl and yet Marleau has. She is under no illusions that Ilya is anywhere near transparent with her, but it's unusual that his teammates would know something she doesn't.

“No way dude,” a defenceman, whose name escapes Svetlana, laughs, “does it look like we’re in Montreal?”

“We play in Montreal in four days,” Marleau shoots back, “and that girl has Roz wrapped around her finger.”

Ilya scowls at them, but doesn’t dispute anything, instead turning back to his phone and drifting away from the table.

The new trade, just excited to be included, asks conspiratorially, “Roz? Really?”

“Yeah,” Marleau says, “every time we’re in Montreal Roz sneaks off to sleep with this woman. It’s been years, like since his rookie year or something, it’s crazy. And he refuses to introduce her to the team, but we know it’s the same one because nobody else makes Roz blush like that,” he furrows his brows and takes a sip of his drink, “I don’t think we even know her name.”

“I saw something over his shoulder once - I think it was like Jill or something?” the defenceman adds, “No last name or profile picture either, he keeps her real secret,” he winks at the new trade, with some innuendo clearly in mind.

Svetlana glances at Ilya, staring at his phone with a look she recognizes from corners in parties in Russia, and mulls it over. Jill isn’t awfully far from Jane, no last name, no profile picture. And Ilya’s fond smile being familiar enough to the team that they immediately identify it as due to Montreal Girl is fascinating, because Svetlana associates this face with Jane.

So Jane is Montreal Girl. Svetlana feels like this is a revelation, she knows more about Jane now than she did before. Except, well, Jane’s still a secret. Despite Svetlana and Ilya’s casual relationship, Svetlana assumed that Jane was a secret because Ilya didn’t want her to get jealous. Or because, in Russia, Jane wasn’t the right kind of girl for Ilya to want. She always thought Jane was a secret to her, but surely his American teammates and friends would know more about Jane than Svetlana would. It didn’t occur to Svetlana that Jane might just be a secret. Full stop.

Ilya finishes his text conversation and makes his way back to the table. Svetlana lets his teammates’ conversation wash over her, no longer bothering to pay attention to understanding their English. Instead, she watches and she wonders.

Ilya keeps secrets, Ilya hides. Svetlana knows this. But he doesn’t keep secrets from her, not like this, he trusts her. He puts his heart in her hands and trusts her to keep it safe, even if he doesn't ever acknowledge he's doing it. He does this because she loves him and he loves her back. He does this because she knows ugly, dirty, secrets the world doesn’t.

She knows he is kind and gentle, because she knew him when his mother was his protector, before he was forced to protect himself with anger and insults. She knows his mother didn’t have an 'accident', because she held Ilya for hours as he cried for his mother, dead next to an empty bottle of pills. She knows he loves hockey because hockey is his way out. Because his mother liked hockey, because his father loves it, because his mother loved his father, because

he feels he must love his father and brother for her, because it kills him inside to love them when they don't love him back, because hockey is how he leaves them and Russia behind. She knows Ilya likes boys, because—

And then things click. Maybe Jane, Montreal Girl is actually Jane, Montreal Boy.

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Svetlana is careful. Because now that she knows what she's looking for she can see how Ilya startles, how he deflects and pretends he doesn't care whenever Jane, Montreal Girl is brought up, however indirectly. He's scared. And he wouldn't have any reason to be scared if Jane was truly a Montreal girl. He wouldn't have any reason to be scared if Jane was an on-again off-again fling either.

So Svetlana prods, gently. She doesn't expect to get a straight answer, but she wants to make sure Ilya can talk about it, if he wants to. Her Ilya would want her to know what he wants, *who* he wants, because her Ilya loves big and loud. Her Ilya would not be able to keep love a secret, yet this Ilya must, and it kills her.

In the car on the way to a party she asks if he's seeing anyone, casually, almost uninterested. He claims he's not, that there's nothing serious. Then she asks "Not even Jane?" He whips his head up to look at her, and his face says, incredulously, *"Dumb question. Why would you ask me that?"*, but it also says, panicked, *"How do you know? What do you know? Why do you want to know?"*

*Oh.*

Oh *Ilya*.

He pretends it's not serious, as if she can't see right through him. She feigns ignorance, even relaying a hello from Sasha. But all she can think about is that her Ilya is in love. Her Ilya is in love with a boy. Her Ilya is in love with a boy and he can't tell anyone about it.

Her heart breaks for him the way it did when his mother died. Because Svetlana doesn't see any way this can end well, and she knows Ilya can't either. His family, awful as they are, are still family, and they're all in Russia. He is a Russian citizen. He plays *hockey*. If he'd been good at basketball or something maybe he'd have a shot at making this work. But Svetlana knows hockey, she's heard his Boston teammates, his coaches, other players, and game commentators all say too much to believe Ilya can figure a way out.

How she wishes she could change the world for him. How she wishes she could protect him, keep him safe and let him finally be happy. How she wishes she could meet Jane and tell him how happy he makes her Ilya, how he makes her Ilya happy in a way she can't. How she wishes his mother were here, to comfort him when things become too impossible to work.

That's the heartbreaking end of it for months.

Until the lead-up of the much-hyped all-star game where Ilya will finally be on the same team as Shane Hollander. A name Svetlana continues to hear, and continues to think is important, but only because he's Ilya's rival, nothing more.

Ilya asks her if she thinks Hollander is a mediocre player. She responds, "No, he's amazing. Those hands. And he's gorgeous." Because he is. He's Ilya's type too, he's said enough about guys now for her to know this.

So it's curious when Ilya just says, "If you say so," instead of agreeing. Because there's the deflecting, the pretending he doesn't care she's become so familiar with. It's the false disinterest she associates with Jane, of all things. She's not sure why this strikes her now, but she must be reading into things, there is no way Ilya's secret Montreal Girl is *Shane Hollander*. There's just no way.

She continues to convince herself that she's reading into things while watching the all-star game where Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov play as if they are one. Fully in sync, it's like they know exactly how the other moves and where they'll be before they make it there. It's beautiful to watch. And of course you study your rival more closely than anyone else, making sure you know everything about their game, that has to be what this is. Of course Ilya would kiss his rival on the cheek after an insane goal, Ilya knows how to play to the press, that's all this is, right?

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Ilya's father dies and Svetlana flies out to Russia, partially for the funeral, mostly for Ilya. His family is hounding him for money and support and she just wants to scream at them to let him grieve. Alexei has the audacity to corner Ilya just after the funeral at dinner. She doesn't have to hear much poorly hidden yelling to join the conversation. If Ilya's mother isn't here to protect him, Svetlana figures she's the next best thing.

And Ilya looks so angry, and so, so fucking sad as his brother stalks out of the room. She steps in and adjusts his shirt, taking care of him in whatever small way she can, holding back tears when he says, "I don't deserve you," because her Ilya deserves the world. Her Ilya deserves happiness and love and joy and so much more than she can give. Of course he deserves her.

In this moment, however, Svetlana thinks he also deserves to know she knows, because his life is crumbling around him and he needs someone to lean on. He needs to know she understands it all, that he can talk to her, in whatever secret way he needs to, about everything.

So when he says "You know I love you." She says, "I know you do. But it's not the same as it is with Jane, is it?" and what she means is: *I know you're in love, I know it's special, I know it scares you.*

There's the flicker of panic she's so used to seeing, but Ilya doesn't get the chance to deflect before she continues.

"I love you too," Because she does. She loves him so deeply. She's been there for him when no one else has, she knows the real Ilya. The kind, gentle, loving Ilya, who gives and gives and gives even when he doesn't have to.

"And whatever you need, I'll be here," because she will be. She'll be there through it all, the way she always has been.

"I'm not going anywhere," because she isn't. Not now, not ever.

"I just hope Jane knows how lucky he is," because he is so incredibly lucky. And because Ilya needs to know: *I know you're in love with a man. I'm happy for you. You can tell me about him, if you need to.*

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One week later Svetlana watches Ilya stare in horror at an unmoving Shane Hollander on the ice and knows with certainty that Jane, Montreal Girl, is Shane, Montreal Boy. And really, all this time, could it have been anyone else? Svetlana doesn't know how she knows that Shane and Ilya just fit, but they do. And she thinks back to the first time she heard Ilya say Shane Hollander's name and wonders if maybe she'd remembered he was important in all the wrong ways. If maybe, even back then, Ilya thought he was important for a reason entirely divorced from hockey and she had failed to see it.

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Svetlana knows Ilya hates Russia, hates the hiding, and yet out of habit or obligation, he is determined to return anyway. She'll go with him, because she always does, but she doesn't know why he ever wants to go back when his parents are dead, he and his brother aren't talking, and the rest of his family are similarly unfriendly. She doesn't say a word though, just helps him pack his bags.

The playoffs didn't go Ilya's way, so the final game for the cup is playing while they sort out final details for the flight to Russia now just several days away. Svetlana leaves the room to make sure Ilya's neice's gifts make it into the suitcase, and when she returns, Scott Hunter is kissing a man on national television and Ilya is picking up his phone and leaving the room.

She looks at the scene in front of her, and thinks that maybe she didn't have to change the world for Ilya. Maybe the world could change on its own.

When Ilya tells her he's not going to Russia anymore she smiles and hugs him, squeezing tightly, because she knows what this means. Ilya hugs her back, not letting go. They don't say a word until Svetlana pulls back, kisses him (delicately, gently, *I love you, no matter what*), and says, "I'm happy for you."

End Notes

This fic was written with 'Pendre soin du beau' by Jessica Charlie (the instrumental plays behind the Shane and Rose convo in ep. 5) on repeat. So many awards to whoever finds the songs for HR because they are so incredibly perfect every single time.

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